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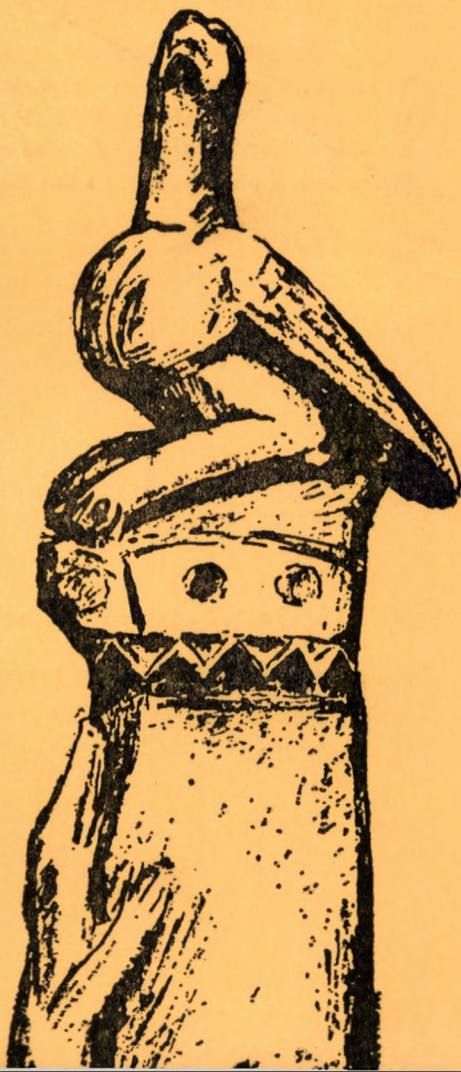
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RHODESIAN HISTORY

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SANE AND PRAGMATIC LIBERALISM: THE ACTION GROUP IN BULAWAYO, 1955-1965

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ON 1 AUGUST 1972 six Europeans met in a private house in Bulawayo and resolved to disband their society, hand over the assets of Rh\$197 to charity and deposit the surviving records in the National Archives. In this way the Action Group, formed thirty years before, was quietly dissolved, its disappearance hardly noticed by the majority of the nominal membership. A fall in interest had been apparent for about eight years and the Group had only lingered on because a few members had hoped for revival of those headier days when they held regular and vigorous discussions and exercised a degree of political influence. This was the period, from the mid-1940s to the late 1950s, when the Group virtually controlled the Matabeleland branches of the federal and territorial governing parties, when ministers made special trips to Bulawayo to attend Group meetings, and government proposals were presented to the Group in order to have them tested in well informed and intellectually rigorous discussion. Most of the members were then in their thirties and forties, their careers were in business or the professions, they were deeply attached to Bulawayo, critical and perhaps envious of Salisbury, and confident that their own brand of sane and pragmatic liberalism represented the best hope for economic development and political stability. By the early 1960s, however, as the membership was getting older the Group was becoming irrelevant. Already divided and weakened by a split within the territorial governing party in 1958, the Group was powerless to prevent the collapse of the Federation which it had so ardently supported or the advent of extremist politics which it so little understood. All attempts to find a new role failed and it was sentiment alone, a quality not so evident in the younger active days, which kept the Group going until a handful of members called a halt in 1972.

Although the records of the Action Group are incomplete,¹ and the Group's political influence was beginning to decline at the point where the full minutes are available, the surviving material provides some insights into recent Southern Rhodesian history, especially for the period from 1955 to

¹ The surviving records of the Action Group are lodged in the National Archives of Rhodesia [Historical Manuscripts Collection] AC3. The full minutes and occasional correspondence and reports are available from 1955 while account books and membership rolls date from an earlier period.

1965. In the first place, because of the Group's central political role in Matabeleland, members were drawn into discussions about the major issues of the day and heard, in confidence, opinions and information which were not often published or recorded elsewhere. These occasions were noted in extensive minutes which are now useful sources for modern white history. Secondly, the minutes are valuable because they incorporate the attitudes of people who thought of themselves as 'moderate' and 'progressive'. Members of the Action Group were certainly not the only European liberals in Southern Rhodesia during the Federation, nor was their particular viewpoint shared by all the Europeans who claimed to be liberal, but a study of their attitudes reveals something of the extent and limitations of white liberalism, a phenomenon which flourished and largely foundered in the 'partnership' years. It is mainly to illustrate this second theme that the records, supplemented by other evidence, are used in this article.

The Action Group was formed in 1942,² principally on the initiative of Peter Gibbs³ a London-born engineer. Along with a few personal friends in Bulawayo Gibbs was dissatisfied with the calibre of the war-time Cabinet which he thought was a ministry of old men of limited or declining ability. Originally the idea was to construct a policy to serve as the basis for an alternative party. Among the issues discussed were native affairs, the railways, minerals policy, fiscal matters and the paltry parliamentary salaries which prevented a new generation from entering politics. One early member was Julian Greenfield⁴ then a practising lawyer in Bulawayo, a man with an instinct for manoeuvre and action rather than discussion and ideas. It was Greenfield who persuaded another eleven out of sixteen members at a meeting in 1944 that they were being too academic and should instead join the 'moribund' United Party led by Godfrey Huggins and capture what remained of its Matabeleland branch. Membership of the United Party was made compulsory and Gibbs promptly resigned, stood as a candidate for the opposition Liberal Party in 1948, and did not re-join the Group until ten years later.

Meanwhile the Group prospered. Several members became office-bearers in the United Party in Matabeleland, a number also stood for parliament,

² The evidence for the formation and early history of the Group is drawn mainly from interviews with the following: P. B. Gibbs, 23 Apr. 1974; J. M. Greenfield, 24 Apr. 1974; A. L. Lewis, 27 Apr. 1974; F. L. Wigley, 24 Apr. 1974. The National Archives have recorded an interview with Greenfield which includes a section on the Group's formation; see Oral/GR 2, 18-20. See also C. Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959), 156-7.

³ Gibbs, b.1903; in Southern Rhodesia since 1934; captain B.S.A.P.; author and engineer.

⁴ Greenfield, b. in Bulawayo 1909; educated Bulawayo and Cape Town; Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar; advocated in the High Court of Southern Rhodesia 1933; United Party M.P., 1948-53; territorial minister, 1950-53; Federal Minister, 1953-63; High Court judge, 1968-74.

although only Greenfield and Cyril Hatty⁵ were successful before 1954. During the 1940s the Group made annual donations to the United Party of more than £200 and gave special assistance to favoured candidates in the 1946 and 1948 elections.⁶ Yet there was nothing especially clever or devious about the way in which the Action Group established its presence. Control of the party in Matabeleland was achieved simply through being the only active body in an area where minimal organisation was bound to bring results. The Action Group was not, and did not need to be, an extra-parliamentary machine; politics in Matabeleland were always informal and only ceased to be leisurely during elections. The same held true for a time after 1953 when the United Party divided into the F.P. (Federal Party) to fight in the federal sphere and the U.R.P. (United Rhodesia Party) to operate on the territorial level: and the Action Group continued to wield influence on both parties although rather more effectively within the latter.⁷ Nevertheless there were at least two occasions when members did act collectively as a pressure group. The first was when they decided to give financial assistance to the United Central Africa Association and resolved to campaign for the Federal cause leading up to the referendum of April 1953.⁸ The second occurred when Greenfield and Garfield Todd emerged as rival candidates to succeed Huggins as Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia. After consulting with Greenfield, who indicated that he wanted to follow Huggins into federal politics, the Group resolved to support Todd who was subsequently elected, a factor which helps to explain why Todd became so scrupulous in sounding out Group opinion.⁹ In the main, however, the members preferred another kind of 'action': a continuing dialogue with territorial and federal ministers on subjects ranging from European immigration to labour relations, education, housing and communications. And, for their part, a number of ministers obviously considered it a duty to submit themselves and their departmental performance to close scrutiny and, at times, sharp criticism.

One reason why ministers were prepared to do this was the assurance of meeting a discreet, intelligent and basically sympathetic audience. Apart from requiring all members to belong to the United Party, and later to the F.P. and the U.R.P., every effort was made to ensure that new members shared

⁵ C. J. Hatty, b. in U.K. 1908; in Southern Rhodesia since 1937; company manager; territorial M.P., 1950-62; territorial minister, 1953-8, 1958-62.

⁶ See AC3/3 [Balance Sheets and Accounts], 1 (1 Aug. 1944-22 Feb. 1971), 1946, 1948.

⁷ The F.P. was always considered to be the more conservative and from the start a number of Group members were worried about the relationship between the two parties. Greenfield claimed that the Group did not have much influence on federal politics, interview with Greenfield, 24 Apr. 1974.

⁸ Interview with Wigley, 24 Apr. 1974.

⁹ The evidence for Todd's election is based on the previously cited interviews with Greenfield, Lewis and Wigley. See also Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, 157. According to Todd the Action Group consisted of 'people of weight' and 'leading people in the Party'. It was 'wise to take note of them', interview with R. S. Garfield Todd, 27 Mar 1974.

the assumptions and outlook of the Group as a whole. To achieve this objective the membership was restricted to around thirty and recruited from a fairly tight circle of friends and acquaintances. In 1955, for example, with the exception of Captain Hopkins¹⁰ who was a rancher, all were professional or business people resident in Bulawayo. There were engineers, doctors, teachers, dentists, city officials, accountants, lawyers, company directors and executives. A number held directorships in the same companies involved in the building industry, textiles or finance.¹¹ Ranging in age from their late thirties to their mid-fifties all but two were men and all save half a dozen were members of the Bulawayo Club. A third were born in Bulawayo, a third in South Africa and of the remaining third most were British. Several were prominent in local affairs: Mrs Brett, for instance, was to become Mayor of Bulawayo in 1960, Arthur Sibson was the City Engineer as well as a noted composer, Dr Hugh Ashton¹² was the City Director of African Administration, Benny Goldstein¹³ was chairman of the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce for some years, A. L. Lewis¹⁴ was the chairman of the Bulawayo Rhodesian National Affairs Association. A number, too, occupied key positions in federal and territorial organisations; Goldstein was at one stage chairman of the Southern Rhodesian Chamber of Commerce while Malcolm Fleming¹⁵ chaired the Federal Chamber and was a member of the Central Africa Currency Board. In 1954, with Greenfield sitting in the Federal Assembly as a minister, A. E. Abrahamson¹⁶ and Cyril Hatty were members of the Southern Rhodesian Legislative Assembly and Hatty was a minister in Todd's Cabinet. After the federal and territorial elections of 1958 J. A. Clark¹⁷ and Captain Hopkins joined Greenfield in the federal house while Goldstein sat with Abrahamson and Hatty in the territorial parliament. The point is that whether they belonged to business or professional associations, social clubs or parliaments, the members of the Group were active and often notable in public affairs, disposed towards a practical rather than abstract or ideological approach to politics, and had come together through shared interests, experiences and convictions.

¹⁰ H. S. Hopkins, b. Bulawayo 1906; R. N. ret'd.; Federal M.P., 1958-63.

¹¹ Most of the companies were based in Bulawayo although Wigley and P. A. Jousse were resident directors of a number of South African and British companies. Wigley, b. in Nottingham 1912; in Southern Rhodesia since 1939; director of mining, cement and finance companies. Jousse, born in Johannesburg 1915; co-director with Wigley.

¹² E. H. Ashton, b. in Basutoland 1911; Oxford and London Universities; Rhodes scholar; Southern Rhodesia since 1949.

¹³ Goldstein, b. in Rumania 1902; Southern Rhodesia since 1907; director of own wholesale business; Group chairman in 1956; territorial M.P., 1958-65.

¹⁴ Lewis, b. in Bulawayo 1919; accountant.

¹⁵ Fleming, b. in Transvaal 1905; Southern Rhodesia since 1930; director of construction companies in Bulawayo; Group chairman in 1955. Fleming made substantial donations to the Group in the 1940s; see AC3/3/1, *passim*.

¹⁶ Abrahamson, b. in Bulawayo 1922; in business in clothing, steel, engineering; territorial M.P. 1954-65; territorial minister, 1958-62.

¹⁷ J. A. Clark, b. in Durban 1914; Southern Rhodesia since 1939; company secretary; Federal M.P., 1958-63; chief government whip and federal minister, 1959-63.

The strongest of these convictions in the 1950s was that the Central African Federation represented the key to the economic future of Southern Rhodesia. If the Federation could be made to work then Southern Rhodesia could take advantage of an expanding market and the importation of capital, technology and skilled white artisans, all to the benefit of industrial, construction and investment activity in Bulawayo. Having, therefore, argued and campaigned for the Federation the members were plainly disappointed by the subsequent record of the Federal Government. They were particularly critical of what they saw as unimaginative leadership and policies, the persisting and growing divisions between the F.P. and U.R.P., and the failure to convert African hostility to approval. These three issues were to receive constant attention during the mid-1950s.

A major complaint was that the Federal Government had not seized the opportunities presented by the new association. By early 1956¹⁸ the Group had compiled a whole list of grievances on this theme: the inefficiency of the F.P. organisation, the lack of Cabinet co-ordination and co-ordination between the Federal and Southern Rhodesian ministers, the failure of the Departments of Agriculture, Immigration and Transport, the unwillingness of the Federal Government to assume full responsibility for African advancement and labour relations in industry. F. S. Owen of Home Affairs and J. M. Caldicott of Agriculture were both adjudged to be incompetent. The Group was plainly shocked to learn at a meeting on 17 November 1955 how the two ministers not only held different views about the desirability of increased European immigration but that Owen's own plans presupposed more of the initiative being taken by outside bodies than by himself. This particular meeting also led to some rather acid exchanges when Owen indicated he could not or would not prevent the occupation of land by immigrant Afrikaner farmers. Nor did the criticism stop at subordinate ministers. Huggins (now Lord Malvern) was attacked for not supplying effective and imaginative leadership. He was accused of tolerating incompetence, of doing little to improve Cabinet co-ordination and of failing to recognise the build-up of public dissatisfaction. The Group in fact told Sir Roy Welensky on 25 September 1955 how they looked forward to his becoming Prime Minister on the expectation of bolder policies for developing agriculture and the transport system and for encouraging British and British South African immigration. Perhaps Owen had flattered the Group by referring to its 'federal outlook' on public affairs and to its potential for changing the policies of high officials; the members would have been more impressed by positive evidence of the Federal Government taking its own tasks seriously.

¹⁸ AC3/8/1 [Minutes of Meetings: 1 Feb. 1955-1 Aug. 1972], 5 Jan. 1956. Unless otherwise stated all references to discussions and opinions will be found in the minutes of meetings in this file and will not normally be cited separately.

Part of the problem was thought to be the existence of two political parties, each purporting to follow the same policies within different areas yet at times diverging to the point of complete rupture. The Group as a whole favoured a fusion as a step towards the co-ordination of policies between governments and a step back from a real split which could only benefit the opposition.¹⁹ But here the Group was in something of a dilemma. On one side there was a lot to be said for the emergence of a strong opposition able to test and probe the Federal Government and for the advent of conventional two-party politics as evidence of the maturity and acceptability of the Federation. On the other side the immediate prospects for a strong opposition were of one hostile to the Federation and based on white reaction and isolationism in Southern Rhodesia. Opposition victories in a Federal and a territorial by-election during the first half of 1956 highlighted this danger from the right and the Group responded by pressing even harder for fusion. Then in June 1956 Todd attacked Malvern at a U.R.P. Congress in Gwelo suggesting that the U.R.P. might have to make its own separate entry into federal politics unless Malvern's Government adopted a more dynamic policy.²⁰ Although Group members appreciated the sentiment lying behind the speech they 'summoned' Todd to Bulawayo to explain himself. From this point the Group worked on both Todd and Welensky urging them to join forces. Several meetings were arranged, including a crucial one on 14 February 1957 attended by thirteen delegates from throughout the Federation of whom three — Greenfield, Colonel J. R. Webb²¹ and P. H. Agar²² — were members of the Action Group. By the middle of 1957 when fusion seemed further away because of differing approaches to franchise changes, members prepared documents isolating the differences between the proposed Federal and Southern Rhodesian franchise laws and tried to show how the differences were either infinitesimal or could be resolved by compromise.²³ Finally at a meeting in Ndola in September, the parties agreed to fuse as the U.F.P. (United Federal Party). Clearly the Group was at least partly responsible. For while Julian Greenfield had made it a personal cause to unite the parties and did this on his own initiative,²⁴ the Group had thrust itself into the centre of the principal discussions and prompted some of them to take place. The motive throughout was the same: to preserve and strengthen the Federation and protect it from the opposition in Southern Rhodesia. Even so some members were wary

¹⁹ There were a number of Group discussions on the fusion held in late 1956 and for the first nine months of 1957.

²⁰ Todd later regretted making this speech as he was accused of attacking the Federal Prime Minister when he was out of the country, interview with Todd, 27 Mar. 1974.

²¹ Webb, Southern Rhodesia since 1943; company director and active in federal territorial and Bulawayo chambers of commerce; Group chairman from the late 1960s until 1972.

²² P. H. Agar, b. in Britain 1923; Southern Rhodesia since 1942; director of a building company; chairman of the Group in 1958 and 1959.

²³ AC3/7/1 [Memoranda: 1956-63], 8 (Comparison of Some Aspects of the Respective Franchise Proposals of Southern Rhodesia and the Federation, n.d.).

²⁴ Interview with Greenfield, 24 Apr. 1974.

because they foresaw an enhanced F.P. influence in Southern Rhodesian politics and, with it, the deadening hand of conservatism controlling the old U.R.P. It took just five months to prove them right.

Given their commitment to the Federation it is not surprising that members regularly returned to the problem of continued African opposition. Initially there were hopes of the Federal Government assuming additional powers and intervening in native affairs in order to implement the concept of partnership. By 1957 the majority of members were beginning to despair of the Federal Government ever understanding the need for decisive action. Greenfield, inevitably, was an exception. J. A. Clark was another who stressed that Africans should not be rushed into politics.²⁵ During 1956 a few members, including Hugh Ashton, emphasised instead the greater importance of building up African confidence in the Federation. Unfortunately for them two factors in 1956 and 1957 made it unlikely that the Africans could ever be won over. First, there was persistent talk within the F.P. of pressing for dominion status for the Federation, a move certain to be popular among Europeans and guaranteed to arouse African suspicions about entrenching white rule. In 1956 the majority in the Group supported dominion status as a logical step in the progress of the Federation. Within a year, however, the mood had changed and most members were arguing for the prior step of mollifying African opinion in all three territories. The second factor was the proposed federal franchise which introduced the concept of a dual roll and which, considered alongside demands for dominion status, could be interpreted by Africans as an attempt to cement racial inequality. By the end of 1957, therefore, the majority in the Group had become convinced that the Federal Government was bent on antagonising the black opposition rather than pacifying it.

On 16 February 1956 the Group discussed future changes in the federal franchise. The members voted in favour of the idea of using whatever Southern Rhodesian qualifications were in existence at the time of the federal elections, provided that the present Southern Rhodesian qualifications were raised to a higher level. This was hardly a radical proposal, and would merely have reinforced the conviction of some Southern Rhodesian Africans that the Europeans in Central Africa would use any means to restrict voting rights. Nevertheless the Group did commit itself to the principle of the common roll. In any case members were primarily concerned at this stage to delay the proposed revisions of the federal electoral legislation until after a promised Southern Rhodesian commission had returned its findings on the territorial franchise. On 1 June Greenfield reported on the progress achieved in civil service discussions and the proposal to introduce a dual roll. Under the scheme

²⁵ See, for example, the proposals of Clark's Umgusa F.P. branch for the meetings of 1 Nov. 1956.

members for the existing twenty-six seats would be elected by voters on an A roll based on a high qualification while less qualified persons could register on a B roll and elect up to nine additional members although, as each B roll seat was instituted, an existing special seat for African interests would be abolished. The Group met again on 14 June and rejected this proposal despite their fears that the European voters in the Copperbelt would be swamped by African voters if the common roll was maintained — 'a point which would have to be faced sooner or later . . . [and some members] . . . felt the later the better but no conclusions were reached'. Like Mrs Sutherby most felt that 'political advancement should not be stimulated'. On 1 November 1957 Hugh Ashton summarised the Group's objections to the dual roll:²⁶ It would introduce racialism and debase the franchise, hasten an extension of the suffrage by offering limited voting powers which Africans would demand and expect to be extended, be hypocritical because once an African won a B roll seat there would be one less special representative of African interests. He also pointed out how special voters under a new Southern Rhodesian law²⁷ would have fewer rights in federal elections thereby giving substance to the charge of the Federation being a disadvantage to Africans. Clearly the Group's own preferences were mixed: while members opposed discrimination on grounds of colour and wanted to retain the common roll for federal elections, they also wanted to ensure that any extension of the franchise would be gradual and based on a strictly maintained standard of civilisation. They were certainly not in favour of immediate progress toward black rule in Northern let alone Southern Rhodesia. Their real objective was to secure the future of the Federation. Throughout the discussions of 1956 and 1957 the emphasis was given to the quest for a settled electoral law, one where the vote would only be available to federal citizens, and where responsible persons of all races would be satisfied that their interests would be protected and advanced by a continued association. Perhaps the quest itself was an unreal one yet the attempt does explain why so many members became frustrated not only by Greenfield's insistence on proceeding with the dual roll but also by his approach of simply imposing a decision from above. As Hugh Ashton argued on 1 November, even if the dual roll was the least objectionable of all the schemes,

then the Federal Government's duty was clearly to publicise and popularise it, particularly among Africans. Their failure to do so was typical of its general failure even to attempt to win African support. Unless African support was forthcoming neither permanent progress nor the real stability of the Federation could be assured.

²⁶ For the final federal franchise see Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, 235-6 and C. Palley, *The Constitutional History and Law of Southern Rhodesia, 1888-1965* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966), 392, 394-5.

²⁷ See below, 71-3.

The Group's approach to territorial representation was no less pragmatic. The issue had to be faced because of the appointment of the Tredgold Commission in December 1956 in fulfilment of Todd's election promise to undertake a revision of the franchise before the next poll. On 17 January 1957 the Action Group met to formulate its own proposals for submission to Tredgold and, specifically, to consider a paper prepared by Mrs Sutherby who advocated a widening of the franchise based on the common roll.²⁸ According to the provisions of the Electoral Act of 1951 a person qualified for the vote by earning an annual income of £240 or owning property to the value of £500, or by being the spouse of someone who met either of these two requirements. Under these provisions there were, in November 1956, 52 184 registered voters of whom only 560 were Africans.²⁹ Mrs Sutherby proposed to increase the number of enfranchised Africans and alter the character of the African electorate by dropping the property qualification and retaining the income requirement at the 1951 level. She also urged the introduction of an alternative educational qualification whereby Africans who had obtained their Standard VI could register. Finally there was the suggestion of a special clause enfranchising 'responsible' Africans who would otherwise be debarred by the educational or income requirement. The Group's reaction was generally cautious. There was strong support for the idea of enrolling 'particularly worthy persons' and members proposed the creation of an Appeal Board to hear the claims of people like ministers of religion. Indeed, precisely because the aim was to enrol a particular element — 'the stable members of the African community' — the Group retained the property qualification in its memorandum to the Tredgold Commission while lowering the figure to £250.³⁰ The main worry was that if the holders of Standard VI were enfranchised between 20 000 and 25 000 Africans would suddenly come on to the roll, an invasion which would upset ordered political progress and threaten the balance of racial power. To avoid this possibility the Group proposed to raise the educational qualification to Standard VIII. The aim throughout was minimal reform: to advance far enough to enfranchise conservative Africans and no further than necessary to isolate the extremists, to convince Africans that they were not being permanently excluded from the roll while 'retaining political power in European hands'. A number of members were even afraid of declaring their support for the principle of universal suffrage believing that such a declaration might be construed as support for an immediate extension of the franchise. They had visions of 'untutored' Africans being swayed by the oratory of demagogues, visions which convinced most white liberals in the 1950s of the virtue of the *status quo* in preference to revolution or reaction.

²⁸ AC3/7/1/3 (S.R. Franchise Commission [1957 Jan.], Proposed Ideas . . . for the Action Group's Evidence . . .).

²⁹ Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, 1962, p. 100.

³⁰ AC3/7/1/4 (Memorandum for Submission to the . . . Franchise Commission).

The Group forwarded its memorandum to the Commission and then met on 16 May to consider the Tredgold findings.³¹ The Commission proposed four categories for the franchise: three sets of ordinary qualifications and a special fourth qualification whereby literate Africans who earned £180 a year could register provided that the votes would not come to more than a third of the total votes cast in any one seat. Criticism was levelled at what members thought was the low financial requirement of the fourth category. There was concern about the effects of inflation which would reduce the value of the figure of £180 to an unsatisfactory index of responsibility.

Discussion was postponed, however, before the Group decided whether to support its own plan for a modest extension of the vote or the idea of a wider franchise with limited powers. By the time the next general meeting was held the representation issue had split the U.R.P. caucus. Todd threatened to resign unless the party agreed to his modified version of the Tredgold proposals, which raised the special qualification and lowered the weighting of the special vote.³² A large section of the caucus thought Todd was going too far. A final decision was due on 19 June and at 'considerable effort on his part' Todd rushed to Bulawayo the day before to explain his stand to the Group. He told them he preferred a 'more liberal' measure but had no hope of getting it through the house while several caucus members thought that the existing legislation was 'too liberal'. On the other hand, the only way of preventing the issue from becoming a racial one was the enfranchisement of 8 000 Africans straight away thereby forcing M.P.s to take notice of their African constituents. In any case Todd did not expect to see any further adjustment for about ten years. Perhaps impressed by this last prediction, the majority of the Group agreed to support the Prime Minister, but, at the same time, the meeting

also generally felt that the matter should not be rushed now as the general mood of the country was not propitious for any reasonably liberal measure: it would therefore be better to leave things as they were.

The two great fears were that the U.R.P. might split over the question and that the European electorate — already, as Todd himself told the meeting, being asked to accept a large volume of 'native' legislation — might reject all liberal measures and support the opposition Dominion Party. Members would have preferred to delay the issue for a year or more, consolidate European opinion and ensure party unity before enfranchising even those 'respectable' Africans who might be expected to exercise the vote in a 'responsible' way. Unfortunately Todd was determined to proceed. All the

³¹ Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, 222-3.

³² For Todd's proposals, see *ibid.*, 229-30.

chairman could do was to appeal to the Prime Minister 'to give the party a chance to support him in this'.³³

It is evident that while some members favoured a moderate extension of the territorial and federal franchise, and did so on the basis of what they saw to be just and equitable, the Group as a whole handled the representation question as a matter of how best to allay European fears, maintain party unity and short-circuit African extremism. The over-riding considerations were that territorial changes should not endanger European rule in Southern Rhodesia and that federal changes should be sufficient only to preserve the existence of the Central African Federation. If, therefore, within Southern Rhodesia, these Bulawayo liberals were ahead of majority white opinion both in perceiving and accepting the necessity of moderate reform, they were a long way short of wanting or expecting a radical shift in the balance of racial dominance. Nor did they share the idealism or crusading zeal of the Salisbury-based Capricorn African Society³⁴ or the Inter-racial Association;³⁵ they were not the kind to entertain fanciful dreams of a multi-racial society. The Group's main direct concern for African advancement lay in the area of industrial conciliation and trade unionism and, even here, a dislike of trade unions in principle and an unwillingness to combat white unionists in practice, hampered attempts to mark out a positive and progressive policy.³⁶ Always the instinct was for change, but for change which did not antagonise the European electorate and which had the overall aim of establishing a rational and settled economic order, an environment where business could flourish and where those with initiative, regardless of race, could prosper. Time and again the Group re-affirmed its faith in partnership, no one advocated extending or retaining the existing discriminatory practices. Yet at no stage in the mid-1950s did these Bulawayo liberals conceive of

³³ Todd did eventually accept another amendment which further weakened the 'liberality' of the franchise. For the final territorial franchise see *ibid.*, 230, and Palley, *The Constitutional History and Law of Southern Rhodesia*, 309-12.

³⁴ The Capricorn Africa Society was formed in 1949 to promote the idea of a united British East and Central Africa. By 1956-7 the Society was committed to the principle of a multiracial state based on a common citizenship and a franchise where citizens could have up to six votes. The Society's plans were probably impractical, the members certainly were. Although the Society believed that changes in the franchise should not endanger 'civilisation' it had the reputation of being dangerously radical and wildly idealistic.

³⁵ The Inter-racial Association of Southern Rhodesia was formed in Salisbury in 1952. The first chairman was Hardwicke Holderness, the most 'liberal' of the members of the U.R.P. Parliamentary caucus. Unlike Capricorn the Association focused on immediate and specific if nonetheless important issues — for example, industrial conciliation and African trade unionism; like Capricorn it was regarded in the white community as eccentric and, if anything, even more dangerously radical because of a deliberate cultivation of social contacts with Africans. Both organizations had lost their momentum by 1958.

³⁶ See the discussions in AC3/8/1, 5 and 19 Apr. and 3 May 1956, 28 Mar. and 16 Apr. 1957. See also the sub-committee reports on the proposed Industrial Conciliation Bill, AC3/7/1/5-7 (Memorandum on the Industrial Conciliation Bill; . . . the findings on . . . ; memo and letter by B. Goldstein, 25 June 1957).

doing anything more than modifying the economic or political structure, or consider whether minor adjustments would be sufficient to enlarge African prospects. Nor did they see any urgent need for reform. Whereas some Europeans in Salisbury were advocating immediate and drastic steps towards African advancement members of the Action Group, no doubt reflecting the attitudes of most liberal whites, believed that their progressive position was a step ahead of the current political realities.

Events in 1958 caused a new departure in the history of the Action Group. Hitherto there had been a broad identity of views as well as of interests, and all members belonged to the territorial and federal governing parties. In early 1958, however, there occurred a division in political loyalties created by a split within the newly merged U.F.P. in Southern Rhodesia; by mid-year the Group was composed of politically hostile camps; by mid-1959 it seemed that the breach was complete and irrevocable.

The strains within the U.F.P. surfaced on 9 January 1958 when Todd returned from a South African holiday to be informed by his Cabinet ministers of their intention to resign. Ostensibly they objected to the way the Prime Minister had recently issued revised labour regulations; it soon emerged that the real objection was to the liberal substance as much as the dictatorial style of his leadership.³⁷ The ministry never liked Todd's 'pro-native' stand during 1957, they liked it even less in an approaching election year. Much to their astonishment, and disappointment, Todd accepted the resignations and appointed a new ministry based on the small liberal group within the U.F.P. caucus. A few weeks later, on 8 February, Todd delivered a brilliant self-defence at a party congress held in Salisbury and although deposed as leader in favour of Sir Edgar Whitehead, who was then in Washington, mustered sufficient strength to retain a place in Whitehead's Cabinet. The conservatives within the U.F.P. were not satisfied. They wanted to remove Todd altogether and their next chance came when Whitehead failed to win a by-election for a Bulawayo seat recently vacated in order to bring the new Prime Minister into the Legislative Assembly. Todd was blamed for the defeat and on 23 April a motion of confidence in Whitehead was carried in caucus by 14 votes to 8. Seven of the dissidents, led by Todd, walked out. They re-formed the old U.R.P. and presented themselves to the electorate on 5 June as the party of common sense progressives in opposition to frightened and unthinking reaction. Perhaps from this vantage point of time the striking thing about the revived U.R.P. was its caution and moderation; in 1958 the white electorate dismissed it as too radical. The bulk of the vote was divided

³⁷ Hatty was one of the Ministers who made the move against Todd although he was less vehement in opposition and appeared to regret the whole affair; this is clear from a pro-Todd account of the crisis, Personal Papers of Mr Hardwicke Holderness (at the time of my research these papers were in Mr Holderness's private possession but are now lodged at The Centre of International and Area Studies, University of London).

between the Dominion Party and the U.F.P. with Whitehead being returned on the preferences of Todd's party. The U.R.P., having no parliamentary representation and no prospects, pondered the problem of whether to become less or more liberal. In June 1959 it was launched as a new organisation — the Central Africa Party — which was avowedly multiracial in composition and objective and seemed, for a time, to present a clear alternative to white and black-led politics.

A majority within the Action Group supported Todd throughout 1958 and 1959. Two members stood for the U.R.P. in the June elections, several worked for U.R.P. candidates in Bulawayo, half a dozen became prominent members of the Matabeleland branch of the Central Africa Party.³⁸ Yet there was a substantial minority, including the three sitting M.P.s (Greenfield, Abrahamson, Hatty) and three prospective M.P.s (Goldstein, Clark, Hopkins), who supported Whitehead from February 1958 and few of them disguised their pleasure at Todd's departure from government and parliament.

At first sight the remarkable thing was that the Group survived at all. There were certainly some extremely awkward moments. Pro-Todd members were angry about the way in which Greenfield seemed to manipulate the February congress and about what they saw as a conspiracy to remove their leader.³⁹ The June elections created problems when Colonel Webb and Abrahamson opposed each other in the Bulawayo East constituency and Group members took executive office in either the U.R.P. or U.F.P. For a time, indeed, meetings had to be suspended and were only resumed on the understanding that members would not be required to join the U.F.P. and that the emphasis in future would be given to studying political events rather than attempting to influence them.⁴⁰

On the other hand there were at least two factors which held the Group together. First both sides were able to agree about what was the basic issue: either to embrace 'clear cut liberalism' or a 'more middle of the road policy'.⁴¹

³⁸ Wigley was chairman and Jousse was treasurer of the Southern Rhodesian division of the C.A.P. Other leading Action Group members included Gibbs, Lewis, A. D. H. Lloyd and Dr I. Sacks. Sacks was a Bulawayo dentist who had supported the Inter-racial Association and who in the mid 1950s had gone further than the other Association members in advocating franchise extensions for Africans; see *Concord* (December 1956), 35. For Lloyd see below, note 52. Ashton was another Group member who had supported the C.A.P. until 1960 when he became 'disillusioned' with Todd, interview with Ashton, 23 Apr. 1974.

³⁹ Interviews with Gibbs, 23 Apr. 1974; Lewis, 27 Apr. 1974; Wigley, 24 Apr. 1974. The U.F.P.-C.A.P. members of the Group believed that Greenfield headed a move by former E.P. members to remove Todd from the leadership of the U.F.P. in Southern Rhodesia because he was too critical of the Federal Government and was making too many 'liberal' gestures. Among the allegations against Greenfield was that he used his position as chairman of the congress to invalidate votes which would have been cast in favour of Todd. Greenfield strenuously denied all the claims of bias, interview with Greenfield, 24 Apr. 1974.

⁴⁰ AC3/8/1, 3 Oct. 1958.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 19 June 1958.

This was important because it meant there was no confusion or misunderstanding to add tension to disagreement. In the second place both sides persuaded themselves that their dispute resulted from a differing assessment of the political situation: whether the real threat to liberalism was represented by the Dominion Party or the right wing of the U.F.P. Precisely because they regarded themselves as moderate liberals the U.F.P. supporters were worried about Todd's 'extremism' antagonising the European electorate and causing it to vote for the Dominion Party. The Todd supporters in early 1958 were less worried about the electorate than about the strength of a right wing in the U.F.P. caucus which they considered to be Dominion Party in all but name.⁴² So long as the argument could continue on these lines, as it did for much of 1958, the debate could take place within a framework of agreed assumptions. In any case as Agar, the Group's chairman, said in his annual report for 1958, while the division of opinion was fundamental 'members are sufficiently united for the greater proportion of their political views.'⁴³ Agar's point was in part verified when, despite his close identification with the U.F.P. in Bulawayo, two pro-Todd members nominated him for another term and other U.R.P. members assured him that he was the person best fitted to hold office in the existing circumstances.

The Action Group was closely involved in the crisis of 1958. Todd addressed two meetings and Whitehead one,⁴⁴ half a dozen members attended the February congress and even more were active in either of the two party organisations. Yet because collective action was impractical collective influence was impossible. For the next few years the Group had to accept it could no longer affect the course of events and instead, guided by the U.R.P. and Central Africa Party members, immersed itself in discussion and research on a variety of issues relating to African advancement.

A crucial change after 1958 was the recognition within the Group of a new situation both in Southern Rhodesia and in Africa at large. On 14 June 1960 Hugh Ashton pointed out how African states to the north were acquiring their independence, the Soviet Union was becoming involved in African affairs and African opinion in Southern Rhodesia, once safely ignored, had now to be taken into account. By 1960 a majority in the Group accepted that extensive reform was necessary to contain African extremism and agreed with Ashton's criticisms of Welensky and Whitehead for their hectoring and lecturing approach to Africans, their failure to educate the

⁴² Ibid., 27 Apr. 1958.

⁴³ AC3/11/1 [Reports: Chairman's Annual Reports, 1955/6-67], 3 Oct. 1958.

⁴⁴ Todd spoke on 31 January between the formation of his new ministry and the U.F.P. congress, and on 25 April after leaving the U.F.P. parliamentary caucus. Whitehead spoke on 27 April and his remarks were notable for his analysis of the prejudices and voting behaviour of the European electorate, the U.F.P. caucus and the U.F.P. branches. He made it quite clear that his own views were controlled by the lean to the right in branches, the party and the electorate.

European electorate 'to face the new Africa' and their tardiness in eliminating racial discrimination. Alongside these objections, and a strong attack on Whitehead's repressive legislation following the Emergency of February 1959, the Group developed franchise proposals for Southern Rhodesia to bring the 'responsible' African leaders within the electoral system and called for sweeping changes to discriminatory legislation and practice. During the period from 1959 to 1962 sub-committees and special meetings considered detailed plans for repealing the Land Apportionment Act and the pass regulations⁴⁵ and for introducing better urban housing for Africans, a fixed minimum wage⁴⁶ and a proper system of job grading. In accord with the new outlook the Group decided to widen its own membership and in mid-1960 admitted three Africans — having initially scrutinised and cleared them of any nationalist affiliations.⁴⁷ Earlier, on 10 September 1959, the Group heard its first black speaker, Mike Hove, the member for Matabeleland in the Federal Assembly, who re-assured the Group that Africans were by and large content, except for specific matters like the franchise, land, education and wages. Unfortunately there is no record of whether Hove or his audience were aware of the irony or the contradiction involved in this estimate.

One area where the Group became strongly critical was the performance of the Federal Government. It has already been shown how members attacked Malvern for the slow pace of activity. After 1958, with the very existence of the Federation under challenge, the tone became more hostile with the main thrust being directed at the Government's brusque treatment of African complaints and at Welensky's antagonistic attitude towards African aspirations. On 8 April 1960 Agar suggested that a propaganda campaign should be launched in the United States to counter adverse criticism. The meeting ignored his proposal and curtly observed that the best defence for the Federation would be 'to put its own house in order'. On June 1960 when Federal M.P.s in the Group complained about the Government not receiving credit for its positive achievements, their remarks were greeted by a 'stony silence'. Basically, having in mind the economic advantages and potential, the Group wanted the Federation to continue but a majority of members wanted to re-shape the Constitution and the Government's policies. They saw the problem in terms of Africans rejecting the Federation because of residual fears of European domination and of delays in African advancement. As a result the Group's memorandum to the Monckton Commission was almost

⁴⁵ See, for example, the material in AC3/7/1/18 (Disabilities of Africans [1960]).

⁴⁶ At a meeting on 4 October 1962 Lewis put forward what his fellow members regarded as a 'revolutionary' proposal that there should be a minimum wage of £19.10s. per month.

⁴⁷ The three Africans were J. S. Moyo, Grey Bango and P. Mhlanga. All of them had connections at that time with either the U.F.P. or the C.A.P., none became regular attenders at Group meetings. Two other Africans were later asked to join and tentative efforts were made to enrol Coloureds and Asians.

entirely devoted to schemes for meeting African objections.⁴⁸ While the initial proposition was that only individuals could effect a change in attitudes the memorandum went on to show how change could be facilitated by structural and legislative amendments. Several suggestions were made: setting the northern territories on the road to self government while withholding dominion status from Southern Rhodesia, the return of some federal powers to the territories and the sharing of others, the removal of the federal capital from Southern Rhodesia, the creation of a Senate and a Bill of Rights and a judiciary independent of appointments by the Federal Government as safeguards against racial discrimination, the widening of the franchise and the abolition of the dual roll. In all the objective was to establish a 'real partnership' in place of the sham of the previous seven years and 'to ensure that genuine African leadership has a recognised and honourable place in the Federal structure' without allowing 'extremist minority opinion . . . to dictate decisions'.

In terms of its own past, and of what the large majority of Europeans would ever concede, the various Action Group proposals of 1959 to 1960 could be considered quite radical. Yet there remained severe limitations on how far its members would go. For one thing they were not converted to the idea of immediate African majority rule. When in March 1960 a congress in Gwelo resolved to lower the Central Africa Party's requirements for the franchise to basic literacy the Action Group members of the party resigned their membership. In taking this step they highlighted one of the dilemmas which confronted all white liberals in the period after Todd's electoral demise whether to trim their policies to win back the minority white electorate or expand them to attract the unenfranchised black majority.⁴⁹ In March 1960 the Central Africa Party members of the Action Group still believed it was possible to liberalise the Whites provided there was no immediate prospect of black rule. Further, they believed that the Africans themselves could be persuaded to join white-led rather than black-led parties, a delusion they shared with those who remained in the Central Africa Party in 1961 and 1962 or followed Sir Edgar Whitehead in the U.F.P. For years the entire Group had disputed the claims of an 'extremist minority' to represent African opinion in any part of the Federation. Even Hugh Ashton, considered to be very liberal by his colleagues, and certainly more alive than a lot of them to African aspirations, could still argue on 14 June 1960 about the danger of Africans rejecting European leadership and forming their own parties; and this at a time when the National Democratic Party was flourishing and white-led multiracial organisations had palpably failed. Perhaps Ashton's judgment

⁴⁸ [1960] 1 *Central African Review* 100-101, 103-104, 106-107, 109-110, 112-113, 115-116, 118-119, 121-122, 124-125, 127-128, 130-131, 133-134, 136-137, 139-140, 142-143, 145-146, 148-149, 151-152, 154-155, 157-158, 160-161, 163-164, 166-167, 169-170, 172-173, 175-176, 178-179, 181-182, 184-185, 187-188, 190-191, 193-194, 196-197, 199-200, 202-203, 205-206, 208-209, 211-212, 214-215, 217-218, 220-221, 223-224, 226-227, 229-230, 232-233, 235-236, 238-239, 241-242, 244-245, 247-248, 250-251, 253-254, 256-257, 259-260, 262-263, 265-266, 268-269, 271-272, 274-275, 277-278, 280-281, 283-284, 286-287, 289-290, 292-293, 295-296, 298-299, 301-302, 304-305, 307-308, 310-311, 313-314, 316-317, 319-320, 322-323, 325-326, 328-329, 331-332, 334-335, 337-338, 340-341, 343-344, 346-347, 349-350, 352-353, 355-356, 358-359, 361-362, 364-365, 367-368, 370-371, 373-374, 376-377, 379-380, 382-383, 385-386, 388-389, 391-392, 394-395, 397-398, 400-401, 403-404, 406-407, 409-410, 412-413, 415-416, 418-419, 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had faltered because he lived in Bulawayo and not Salisbury.⁵⁰ The significant point, however, is that no one in the Group could or would acknowledge the possibility of ending European leadership or domination in Southern Rhodesia or in the Federation. If a majority in the Group had come to recognise the urgency of the situation the prevailing view was still for reform within the existing system. The tactic remained one of accommodating 'responsible' Africans, the belief persisted that 'responsible' Africans still wanted to be part of a white-led society.

It was this approach, in conjunction with the split of 1958, which hampered effective action after March 1960. Denied access to the inner councils of the U.F.P., and having balked at the idea of black-led politics, the majority in the Action Group lacked any kind of power base. Members were acutely aware of this. In October and November of 1960 there were protracted discussions on the various alternatives: re-joining the U.F.P., amalgamating the U.F.P. and the Central Africa Party, rallying the Central Africa Party and the National Democratic Party behind a national leader.⁵¹ These discussions were held at a time when moves were being initiated by Bulawayo lawyers and business men to launch a National Front under the leadership of Sir Robert Tredgold.⁵² Another scheme was to use the National Convention, a multiracial non-political assembly which met from 31 October to 5 November, as the basis for an organisation to unite all races and factions in Southern Rhodesia.⁵³ The Group could not make up its mind about either of these proposals and both in any case fizzled out for want of support. On 31 August and 21 September 1961 the Group again debated its future on a motion by Peter Gibbs to re-join the U.F.P. His former Central Africa Party associates quashed the idea. Whitehead was still anathema and regarded as a liability because he was disliked by Whites as well as Blacks. Besides, a decision in 1961 to re-join the U.F.P. would have split the Group and all to little purpose; as several members pointed out the time was gone when influence could be exercised from Bulawayo now that Salisbury clearly dominated business and politics in Southern Rhodesia. On the other hand it is hard to see what the Group could hope to achieve outside of the U.F.P. Having rejected the Central Africa Party for being committed to majority

⁵⁰ Ashton regarded the riots in Bulawayo in July 1960 as 'a terrible shock'. He had not been aware of any nationalist politics in Bulawayo regarding the National Democratic Party as essentially a Salisbury phenomenon where African nationalism was certainly more visible to Europeans, interview with Ashton, 23 Apr. 1974.

⁵¹ AC3/8/1, especially the discussion of 27 October and 10 November.

⁵² One supporter of the National Front was A. D. H. Lloyd, a pro-Todd member of the 1954-8 Legislative Assembly who was active in the revived U.R.P. and the C.A.P. Lloyd was a Bulawayo lawyer, an Irish immigrant who joined the Group for a short period in 1960 and 1961. He was one who never forgave Whitehead for the events of 1958 and always urged the Group to stay out of the U.F.P.

⁵³ The Group was much more involved in the Convention and gave £100 towards expenses, AC3/3/2 (Balance Sheets, 1 July 1955-30 Sept. 1963). Malcolm Fleming played a leading role in organising support for the Convention in Bulawayo.

rule in the near future, and regarding both African nationalism and European reaction as equally abhorrent, there was nothing left to support save worthy but inconsequential causes like the Courtesy Campaign or Build a Nation.⁵⁴ In October 1962 the pro-U.F.P. chairman pleaded with members to develop firm objectives and to help retain a liberal government in office.⁵⁵ At a meeting on 9 January 1963 it was resolved unanimously to support the U.F.P. and return to active party politics. In the intervening period, however, the Rhodesian Front had come to power.

The election of the Rhodesian Front meant that for the first time the Group found itself in opposition. The implications of this became clear when in 1963 Peter Gibbs wrote to Ian Smith, the Minister of Finance, inviting him to Bulawayo to talk about the economic situation.⁵⁶ Gibbs pointed out how members of the Group had opposed the Rhodesian Front at the recent election. The meeting was never held. There was now no choice but to continue the opposition. Members tried to whip up a campaign in Bulawayo to forestall U.D.I., they gave money to candidates opposing the Rhodesian Front in the 1965 elections, a meeting was arranged with British ministers, there were talks with other organisations in the hope of establishing a united front. Ironically, and significantly, the most determined stand taken by the former members of the U.R.P. and the Central Africa Party was their refusal to go along with plans to draft Sir Roy Welensky to succeed Whitehead in 1964. Welensky was blamed for the break-up of the Federation in 1963; and the old priorities had not been forgotten. The difficulty was to find new ones which could be implemented. By 1965 the Rhodesian Front looked to be invulnerable; and the opposition had virtually disintegrated and, unable to attract new and younger members,⁵⁷ the Action Group began to look like the old United Party clique of twenty years before. Occasionally after 1965 there were rumblings and stirrings; for the most part meetings were infrequent and the attendance dwindled. By 1972 there seemed to be no point in going on.

In one sense the history of the Action Group is bound up with the relative position of Bulawayo within Southern Rhodesia and the Central African Federation. Throughout the 1950s and the early 1960s members repeatedly bemoaned the declining significance of the city and saw this as a principal cause of their own diminishing influence. There were, it has been

⁵⁴ The Courtesy campaign was launched by a group of Salisbury women in late 1960 and was designed to persuade the races to be nice to each other. The Build a Nation campaign of early 1962 sought to register African voters in defiance of the National Democratic Party. Some Group members were unhappy because Build a Nation was run by U.F.P. officials. They need not have been bothered. The campaign was a dismal failure.

⁵⁵ AC3/11/1, 11 Oct. 1962.

⁵⁶ AC/3/1/1 (Correspondence and Other Papers: General, 15 Feb. 1955-18 Dec. 1973), Gibbs to Smith, 13 July 1963.

⁵⁷ The point was often made at meetings in the late 1960s that the membership was getting old and there was ineffectual talk about attracting a younger generation.

shown, other specific factors: the split of 1958, the absence of a power base between 1960 and 1962, the advent of the Rhodesian Front. Even so it is not easy to find evidence at any stage of influence being exercised on government policy as distinct from party affairs. One member in 1958 wondered whether ministers had ever really taken the Group into their confidence and he regarded past influence as 'largely academic'. Annual Reports might claim there was 'little doubt' about the Group exercising 'quite an influence in political circles', or boast 'some effect' in bringing about the fusion of 1957 or co-ordinating the territorial and federal franchise. What these reports do not reveal are examples of deliberations directly affecting the course of official policies. Garfield Todd certainly had a high estimate of the members' ability and of their importance, Julian Greenfield thought it worthwhile to cancel a parliamentary trip to Kariba and attend a meeting following Todd's Gwelo speech in June 1956, five federal ministers spoke to the Group in that same year. Yet for all the energy and effort, and the role played in territorial political affairs, especially in Matabeleland, the Group was never able to achieve its objectives of the 1950s: an accepted federal system, dynamic federal policies for expansion, the right conditions for the general economic progress of the Federation.

Instead, by the late 1950s, members were having to resign themselves to the probable break-up of the Federation. By then the over-riding issue had become the situation in Southern Rhodesia, and the sane and pragmatic liberals of Bulawayo were caught up in something for which they had no answer and over which they had no control. Unable to speak in a single voice they, like other white liberals in the early 1960s, just floundered about hoping to be heard. More important, however, members of the Action Group, in company with those Europeans who hovered on the liberal fringe of the U.F.P., had not in their hearts abandoned the framework of European supremacy. As liberals they were caught arguing for a compromise when the extremes would not budge, as Europeans they preferred a compromise which would sacrifice little or nothing of their own interests.



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